



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

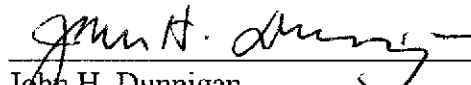
NMFS ANNOUNCES DECISION NOT TO PROCEED WITH ISSUING EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS FOR THE PURPOSES OF CONDUCTING BYCATCH REDUCTION RESEARCH

Six operators of permitted pelagic longline vessels requested Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) to conduct bycatch reduction research in the following regions of the Atlantic Ocean: North of Cape Hatteras, South of Cape Hatteras, and Gulf of Mexico (GOM). The primary purpose of this research was to determine if gear modifications and/or various techniques can be found to avoid incidentally-caught white marlin, blue marlin, bluefin tuna, and sea turtles, while allowing for the targeted catches of allowed species.

NMFS has considered the public comments received, as requested in the Federal Register (70 FR 17069), and has decided not to proceed with issuing exempted fishing permits until such time as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared to further assess the impacts associated with fishing in existing pelagic longline closed areas.

NMFS believes that bycatch reduction research in the pelagic longline fishery is important to compare or evaluate different bycatch reduction fishing methodologies, explore new bycatch reduction gear technologies, and investigate ways to tailor and refine existing time/area closures. Thus, NMFS will proceed with bycatch reduction research in areas currently open to pelagic longline fishing. Bycatch reduction information will be gathered via research efforts conducted outside of closed areas, consistent with a NMFS-issued cooperative research grant. Further consideration of bycatch reduction research inside of closed areas may occur upon completion of an EIS.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to Atlantic HMS fisheries interests to keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information, please contact Heather Stirratt, 301-713-2347.


John H. Dunnigan
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

5/3/05
Date



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